

Strategic Implications of Emerging Threats to West African Countries

by

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

**STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF EMERGING THREATS TO WEST AFRICAN
COUNTRIES**

by

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ABSTRACT

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One of the most challenging issues West African countries are facing at the beginning of the 21st Century is their common security. Located in the western most region of the African continent, West Africa includes 16 countries in an area of approximately 6 million square km. During the past twenty years, this region has been subjected to major conflicts, several insurgencies, and five military coups or attempted coups.

While this regional turmoil has more or less been successfully handled, either by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the United Nations Organization (UN), West Africa is far from being out of trouble. Indeed, due to the political, economic and security weaknesses of many countries, new pernicious and opportunistic threats are emerging throughout the region.

The purpose of this paper is to study the specificity of these new threats, the strategic implication for West African Countries, what responses have so far been brought and their effectiveness and how policies might be explored or improved to address them.

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS OF EMERGING THREATS TO WEST AFRICAN COUNTRIES

Over the past two decades, West Africa has captured the attention of the international community. Indeed, the region has experienced significant turmoil, the souvenirs of which are still pregnant in the collective memory of its inhabitants. Located in the western most region of the African continent, West Africa includes 16 countries in an area of approximately 6 million square km. Due to its geographic position at the intersection of American, European and African trade routes, any event in West Africa may have an impact on the aforementioned continents.

One of the most challenging issues West African countries are still facing in the beginning of the 21st Century is their common security. During the past twenty years, this region has been subjected to four major conflicts or civil wars, various insurgencies, five successful military coups and several attempted or alleged coups.

While past turmoil has been more or less successfully handled either by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) or the United Nations Organization (UN), West Africa is far from being out of trouble. Indeed, new pernicious and opportunistic threats are emerging and spreading throughout the region due to the political, economic and security weaknesses of many states, as well as its ideal geographic location. Drug trafficking, terrorism, piracy and the reemergence of unconstitutional change of government combine to undermine the constant efforts undertook to get the region out of the reign of mayhem and darkness into the sunny uplands of peace and stability.

The purpose of this paper is to study the specificity of these new threats, the strategic implication for West African countries, what responses have so far been brought and their effectiveness, and how policies might be improved to address these threats.

The paper is divided into three parts. Part one describes the region demonstrating how geography and history have played a key role in shaping West Africa. There follows in part two the threats to regional security. Finally, the paper will assess the current strategies of action of West African countries before making recommendations on how they might be improved to address future threats.

Description of West Africa

Located in the western region of Africa and occupying one-fifth of the continent, West Africa is slightly smaller in size than the continental United States and more than twice the size of Western Europe. Oriented west of an imagined North-South axis the region lies close to 10° East longitude. It is surrounded in the West and the South by the Atlantic Ocean, while the northern border is the Sahara Desert. The Niger Bend is generally considered the northernmost part of the region. The eastern border is less precise, with some placing it at the Benue Trough at the northern boundary of the Niger Delta, and others on a line running from Mount Cameroon to Lake Chad.

There are many different mappings of the states that compose West Africa¹. According to the United Nations West Africa includes 17 countries (Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cote d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Saint Helena, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo)². The U.N. also considers the island of Saint Helena, a British overseas territory in the South Atlantic Ocean, as part of the region. However, like Doyle citing the geographers de Blij and

Muller (2006) and Stock (2004)³, the most commonly accepted delimitation will be used for the purpose of this paper. So the area considered will be the one covered by the territory of the fifteen members of the Economic Community of West African States or ECOWAS plus Mauritania⁴.

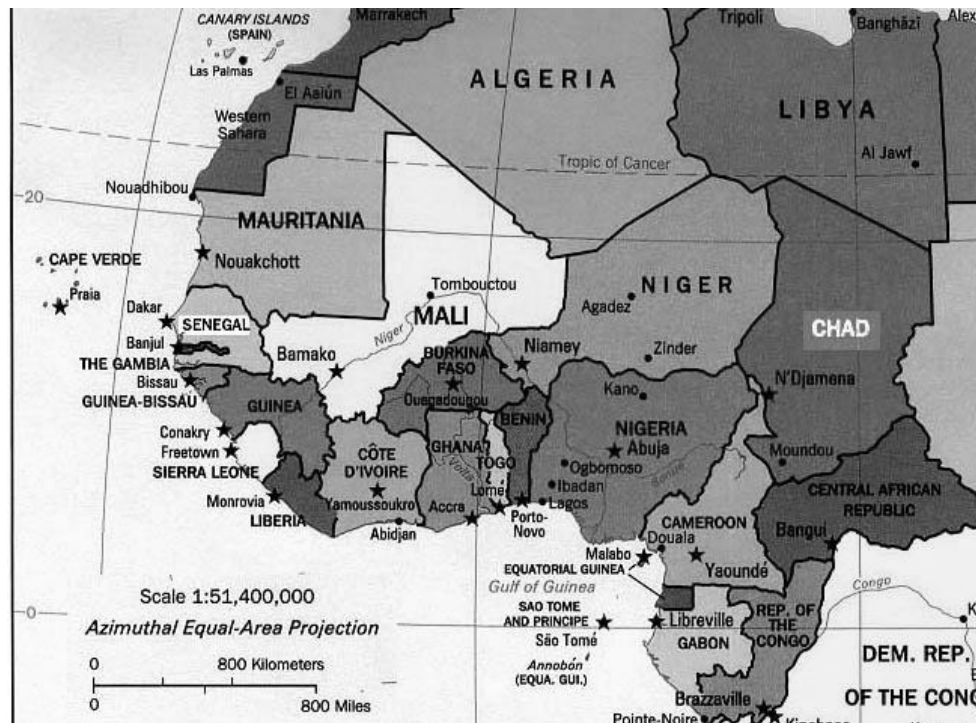


Figure 1: Map of West Africa

West Africa is often referred to as “Low Africa”⁵ because most of this lies less than 300 meters above sea level, although isolated high points exist in a number of countries along the southern shore of the region. Mount Nimba, located next to the border between Ivory Coast and Guinea, is the highest point in West Africa with an altitude of 1752 m.

From North to South, West Africa sits astride three horizontal belts. The northern section is composed of semi-arid terrain known as Sahel, a transitional zone between

the Sahara desert and the second belt, the savannas of the western Sudan. The rain forests form a third layer between the savannas and the southern coast, ranging from 160 km to 240 km in width.

Due to its position north of the Equator, the climate of West Africa is influenced and determined by the movements of the Intertropical Convergence Zone or ITCZ. This belt of convective atmospheric lifting translates north and south, depending on the predominant influence of either the Azores or Sahara Highs in the North or Saint-Helena High in the South. The further north the ITCZ moves, the more rain the region receives with the monsoon winds blowing south. Consequently, there is a chronological succession of humid and dry seasons. During the dry season hot winds carrying great amounts of dust blow from the Sahara High in the entire region through Cameroon and Chad. This phenomenon known as Harmattan has a great impact on the economy and the health of populations⁶.

From the standpoint of biogeography, the vegetation in West Africa is rich and diversified. North to South, the landscape varies in horizontal belts from semi-desert steppes in the Sahel belt to high grass planted with trees in the savannah of the Sudan layer. The third band is represented by the forests of the Guinean belt, while the last layer covers the rain forests of the Gulf of Guinea. Additionally, micro bio-climates can be noted along the corridors of the main rivers flowing across the region: the Niger, the Senegal, the Volta, the Mano, the Gambia, and the Casamance⁷.

History of the Region

West Africa is one of the most dynamic regions of Sub-Saharan Africa⁸. The settlement of populations in the area is very ancient and there are evidences of human presence in the region as early as the Paleolithic or Old Stone Age⁹. Today, the total

population of the region is estimated to around 309 million inhabitants, with 158.3 million living in Nigeria alone¹⁰. In terms of composition, there is a distinction between savannah and forest people. In general the former tend to be tall in stature and dark brown in skin color. They include the Mandingoes or Mande-speaking (the Soninke, the Malinke, the Bambaras, the Mossi, the Songhai, the Hausa and the Kanuri) and the Senegambians (the Wolof, the Tukulor, and the Serers). In contrast the foresters are smaller and as their name suggests seek refuge in the forests (the Ibo, the Edo, the Yoruba, the Nupe, the Ashanti, the Fon, the Kru, the Kpelle, the Temne and the Mende). But the most important distinction between the two peoples is the ethno-religious division. The northern part of the region is strongly influenced by Islam. In contrast the southern portion is populated by practitioners of Christianity and traditional tribal religions¹¹.

The history of West Africa can be divided into five major periods. The first one is the Prehistory which saw the settlement of populations who developed agriculture during the new Stone-Age¹². The second, during the Iron Age, viewed a relative prosperity of people due to the domestication of camel, the mastering of iron working and an extensive trade. This period saw the establishment of the centralized empires, beginning with the Nok civilization, 500 B.C., the Ghana Empire (? -1052), The Sosso Empire (1052- 1235), the Mali Empire (1235- 1464), the Songhai Empire (1464 -1591). However, over time these empires declined, creating a vacuum filled by the creation of several kingdoms, based upon ethnic group. Approximately at the same period the Europeans started to settle in the region alongside coastal trade points¹³.

The third period saw the development of extensive relationships with the Europeans and the Triangular Trade. During the fourth, the colonial period, France and Great Britain dominated the whole region. Britain controlled The Gambia, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Nigeria, while France gathered Senegal, Guinea, Mali, Burkina Faso, Benin, Côte d'Ivoire and Niger into one entity called French West Africa. Portugal founded the colony of Guinea-Bissau, while Germany claimed Togoland, but was forced to divide it between France and Britain following First World War. Only Liberia retained its independence, at the price of major territorial concessions. Last but not least, in the fifth period, between 1957 and 1974, the current nations were formed, after decolonization¹⁴.

Traditional Threats in West Africa

The evolution of the region after the independence is not linear. It follows three main time frames which roughly delineate the predominance of specific major threats to peace and stability. The first covers 1957 to 1989; the second includes the period 1990 up to 2004 and the last one from 2004 onwards.

During the first period, the region went back and forth between Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism. After the euphoria of the liberation, West African countries had to face the reality of statecraft in a context of pervasive international environment where Cold War rivalries dominated. The span of choices in terms of political alliances was not large. Countries were forced to be allied with one of the blocs or to remain neutral. The Non Align movement launched in 1955 during the Bandung Conference in Indonesia, by India, Indonesia, China and Egypt polarized the attention of most West African countries. Meanwhile, the link with former colonial powers were still strong, especially in the "French pre-carre" (zone of influence) where the umbilical cord was not really

cut¹⁵. The presence of thousands of technical assistants and the signature of all kinds of accords with the newly independent countries guaranteed a concealed France control over its former colonies. The three decades following the wave of independence of the sixties and seventies¹⁶ were characterized by a relative stability, though recurrent military coups overthrew governments in several countries. From 1963 to 1990 the region has witnessed 26 successful coups and more than 30 failed attempts¹⁷. Only Cape Verde and Senegal have been free of military intervention in domestic politics since independence.

Except for a short localized engagement between Mali and Burkina in December 1985¹⁸, skirmishes along the border between Senegal and Mauritania in 1989¹⁹, and Guinea-Bissau's liberation war against Portugal (1960-1974)²⁰, the main threats to peace and stability usually occurred within state perimeters, especially in Nigeria and Senegal. From 6 July 1967 to 15 January 1970 the Nigerian Civil War took place, also known as the Nigerian-Biafran War. It was a political conflict caused by the attempted secession of the southeastern provinces of Nigeria as the self-proclaimed Republic of Biafra. The conflict stemmed from economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions among the various peoples of Nigeria. Ultimately the Biafran secessionists would be defeated, but not before the conflict had caused around three million deaths and destabilized the whole region²¹. The other main upheaval is the Casamance separatism which started in December 1982 with the purpose of gaining the independence of the southern part of Senegal. The persistence of the uprising still endangers the area and continues to have negative repercussions for the stability of the neighboring countries of Gambia, Guinea and Guinea Bissau²².

Notwithstanding these coups, attempts (like in the Gambia in 1981)²³ and conflicts, regional stability has more or less been guaranteed. This is partly because of the Cold War strictures, the action of regional organizations like ECOWAS (founded in 1975) and the Agreement of Non-Aggression and Defense Assistance (ANAD), founded in 1977²⁴. Perhaps the most important factor is the involvement of former colonial powers, eager to retain control of their zones of influence under the western umbrella.

The second period of post independence evolution represents the most dramatic era in the region's recent history. With the end of the Cold War, Africa in general and West Africa in particular lost their geostrategic value. The focus of the great powers was to develop cooperation and relationships with the newly liberated countries of East Europe and to catch the rays of the rising New World Order. However, the wind of change blowing throughout the world did not bypass the sub-region. Encouraged by a favorable international environment more and more voices started to call for democratic changes and economic development.

Despite this, the effects of structural adjustments plans from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB) harshly affected local populations dominated by unemployed youth and rural inhabitants. Surprisingly, the voices of the Africans found an echo in France. During the Franco-African summit of La Baule on June 20, 1990, French President Francois Mitterrand clearly expressed to African heads of states that the wind of change had to also blow over Africa. In other words, France would no longer support dictatorships, promoting instead democracy and good governance as the route necessary to future development²⁵. The combined effects of the wind of change, the growing bulge of disaffected and impoverished youth, economic

stagnation and the abandoning of dictators by their Western supporters opened Pandora's Box from which the good, the bad and the ugly escaped and spread all across the sub region.

The first and most positive consequence was political; the birth of a wave of national conferences aiming to solve main grievances and resolve the issue of democratic transition. They were held in Benin (February 1990), Niger (July through November 1991), and Togo (July through August 1991), with all countries represented then being ruled by military dictatorships²⁶. The outcome was the resolution of the issue of democratic exercise of power, regime change and the move towards the civilian exercise of power in Niger, Mali and Benin.

The second effect of the wind of change was the proliferation of small arms and weapons. The dislocation of the Soviet bloc and the lack of control over existing ex-Pact of Warsaw arsenals enabled smugglers to overwhelm the region with arms²⁷.

Unfortunately the availability of large quantities of weapons in the context of discontentment against unscrupulous and corrupt governments led to a wave of cruelty and barbarism throughout West Africa. This was particularly the case in the Mano River Basin and the Gulf of Guinea. As stated by Patrick McGowan, "with the beginning of the Liberian war in 1989, a new pattern of serious conflict has developed in West Africa. Civil wars in Cote d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone have diffused conflict and refugees across the Southwestern part of the region²⁸." Thus Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire experienced years of horrible civil wars, which have bled these countries dry²⁹. In response to these ongoing humanitarian dramas, the United Nations authorized a range of peace operations in the four affected countries³⁰ in

order to backup the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), which intervened in Liberia, Guinea Bissau, Cote d'Ivoire³¹. In 1999 the United Kingdom was obliged to deploy its troops in Sierra Leone to stop rebel's attacks³².

The consequences of these civil wars were felt beyond national borders impacting negatively on the peace and stability of the surrounding countries. Too often the warring factions ignored states boundaries, with the consequence that violence spread across the region. Another effect of these civil wars was the influx of refugees in neighboring countries and even in countries far removed from the conflict areas. For instance, the first Liberian civil war (1989-1996) created around 600,000 international refugees out of a population of 2.5 million. The second civil war (1999-2003) sent, in 2004, approximately 7,000 Liberian refugees to the United States, Norway and Sweden³³.

The third consequence was the complete destruction of national economic infrastructure. Before the war, Cote d'Ivoire was considered the locomotive of the West African Economic and Monetary Union (UEMOA)³⁴ but due to the conflict the country's growth slowed drastically. Even though the government was still in power, its authority covered only one part of the country, causing great loss to the fragile economy of the country³⁵. In Liberia and Sierra Leone the situation was even worse. The weaknesses of governments lead to the development of war economy with the warlords in control of high earning natural resources. The particular presence of diamond mines fueled the conflict attracting mercenaries and smugglers alike³⁶. Another noticeable consequence of these civil wars was the spread of small arms in the region. It is estimated that between 5 and 8 million guns are now in circulation throughout West Africa³⁷. The

proliferation of these weapons represents one of the region's most dangerous threats to peace and stability. With the bulge of unemployed, bored and hungry young men, the availability of these guns is a constant source of concern.

The effects of these threats were not only felt by West African people. Each year tens of thousands flee the region's conflicts and poverty, crossing the Sahara desert to seek new lives in Europe. In 2003, 17000 illegal migrants, mainly from West Africa, were intercepted while trying to enter the Spanish island of Azores, and about 22 000 people reached Italy by boat in 2006 and 37 000 in 2007.³⁸ In addition, the region's instability has affected the International Community. The 2004 UN missions in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire cost \$ 301,870,000; \$846,820,000 and \$378,480,000 respectively³⁹.

The threats to regional stability were not only armed violence or military coups. Indeed the region was also unstable because of vulnerabilities inherent to its geographic position and internal dynamics. West Africa lays between two immense geographical features, the Sahara desert in the North and the Atlantic Ocean in the South. These porous natural borders are difficult to control for the weaker states, many of which are severely lacking in the means needed to secure them. Thus transnational organized crime has become a critical concern for international security. The unregulated flow of illicit goods, including weapons, narcotics, human trafficking and black market commodities, are a threat to the security and territorial integrity of the modern nation states. Combined with military and political adventurism, ethnical divisions, plundering and illegal exploitation of natural resources, weak institutions and inefficient governance, a "perfect storm" of conditions has formed which continues to

perpetuate the cycle of poverty and instability in the region. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) ranks thirteen out of sixteen countries in the West African region as low human development and half of the states in the region are in the bottom rated 15 countries for overall development⁴⁰. In addition, West Africa faces environmental challenges which complicate further the fragility of the region. Alternating between severe cyclical drought and heavy flooding, West Africa is particularly prone to the extremes of climate change. Furthermore, locust invasions, prevalent diseases like malaria, heavy deforestation, serious water and air pollution, irresponsible exploitation practices, plundering of resources by devious warlords and politicians all contribute to and perpetuate instability. Nevertheless, the continuous efforts of the UN, the ECOWAS and International Community have managed to circumvent the effects of recent civil wars and to stabilize the Mano River Basin.

The third phase of West African evolution started in 2004 with UN peacekeeping operations which brought a relative stability in the region. Their main objectives were to forget the scourges of civil war, harvest the dividends of democracy, and focus to achieve development. Today, civil wars and interstate conflicts have almost stopped in the area; however but West African Countries are yet not out of danger. Indeed, new kinds of threats have emerged in the past five years that constitute a growing danger for the region.

Overview of Contemporary Threats

In 2011 the UN Security Council identified four emerging threats, drug trafficking, terrorism, piracy and unconstitutional change to government, considered as the most challenging for West African countries⁴¹. These new menaces are specific compared to the ones that up until now have been so prevalent in West Africa.

Firstly, with the exception of threats to governance, they are mainly fueled by outsiders to the region. While drug traffickers, terrorists and pirates have local connections, the commodity or ideology comes from other parts of the continent or the world (North Africa and Latin America). Secondly, the actors have large financial or material assets, which allow them to overwhelm and subvert weak states. Thirdly, most of these new threats ignore the presence of frontiers with the actors taking advantage of the existing borders to limit the action of law enforcement. And finally, these threats can quickly and profoundly destabilize a country. While the immediate effects are internal they also impact the wider region and the international community.

The first of these threats is drug trafficking. Since the first years of the 21st Century an “invisible tide of drug trafficking” is rising on the shores of West Africa, creeping around the countries⁴². The region has emerged as a major hub in the global drug economy. It is estimated that between 50 tons to 300 metric of cocaine consumed in Europe may transit West Africa annually⁴³. Since 2004 specialists have observed a surge in the transshipment, bulkerizing and the transfer of cocaine. Between 2005 and 2008, 46 metric tons of cocaine destined for the Western European markets was seized by law enforcement officials in or around West Africa. Only a few years before, annual seizures of over one ton for the entire African continent were rare⁴⁴. Furthermore, approximately 3.4 tons were seized from 1,357 couriers on commercial air flights from West Africa to Europe since 2004, with 62% of the incidents and 55% of the cocaine coming from the countries of Senegal, Nigeria, Guinea and Mali⁴⁵.

In addition to cocaine, the region has also been used for the trafficking of heroin and cannabis resin⁴⁶. Although cocaine is produced in Central and South America, the

surge and seizure indicates that the sub-region is used as an important transit area for cocaine trafficking between Latin American countries and Europe⁴⁷. What attracts South American drug traffickers has less to do with West Africa's geographical position than the presence of an attractive market in Western Europe and the success of authorities in the USA, Mexico and Colombia in their fight against the drug cartels⁴⁸.

Cocaine arrives in Africa by air and by sea. Although two hubs have been identified in Ghana and Guinea-Bissau, none of West African countries are exempt from these shipments. Landing of small aircrafts with drug cargo have been reported in Mauritania, Mali, Guinea-Bissau and Guinea. Along the coastline, drug seizures have been reported in Senegal, Gambia, Guinea-Bissau, Nigeria, and Ghana⁴⁹. If cocaine trade through West Africa has been reduced to about 25 metric tons per year in 2007 through 2008, the retail market value remained huge at an estimated \$6.8 billion at destination in 2008⁵⁰. This high value of cocaine compared to local economies remains the greatest danger in West Africa. If we take the example of a country like Guinea-Bissau, its entire GDP was only \$304 million in 2006, or the equivalent of six tons of cocaine at wholesale level in Europe. With a national budget equal to 41.3% of its GDP or \$125 million, this equates to slightly more than the wholesale value of two and half tons of cocaine⁵¹.

So the large amount of money at stake allows the traffickers to infiltrate states to the very highest level through corruption. The accusation of drug trafficking of the Rear Admiral Jose Americo Bubo Na Tchuto, Navy Chief of Staff in Guinea-Bissau, is illustrative on how drug trafficking can reach the highest levels of government⁵². Another danger of cocaine trafficking in West Africa is the development of local

networks of retail dealers and local consumption, because the West Africans helping the drug traffickers are usually paid in kind, often up to one quarter of the shipment⁵³. The danger of drug trafficking in West Africa is obvious. “Drug money is perverting the weak economies of the region. In some cases the value of the drugs being trafficked is greater than the regional countries' GDPs. Drugs are also poisoning the region's youth since the foot soldiers in this growing trade are paid for their services with cocaine. As a result, the region is becoming increasingly vulnerable to drug and crime with the risk that states will become “mock states” with less or no real power.

The second emerging threat in West Africa is terrorism. Until recently the region was free of terrorism threat. Religious oriented actions like the bombing of US embassies in Nairobi and Dar Es Salam did not occur in the area, although sporadic confrontations with religious connotations existed, particularly in Nigeria. However, increasingly terrorism has emerged as a major threat to peace and stability in the region with Al Qaida, the Taliban and the Hezbollah reported to have links in West Africa. Al Qaida, it is represented by its branch called, Al Qaida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), and constitutes the primary terrorist threat in West Africa. With its origins in Algeria, it was created when the Salafi Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) pledged allegiance to Al Qaida's senior leadership in January 2007. AQIM aspires to become a transnational movement across the Maghreb and Sahel areas, with the most immediate threat to the latter⁵⁴.

It seems AQIM operatives have developed their techniques from Asian theaters, in Iraq and Afghanistan, and with their leaders, including Mokhtar Bel Mokhtar and Abdel Hamid Abu Zeid, base their strategy on the support of nomadic tribes in the

Sahel. AQIM's actions in the Sahel focus on kidnapping high value targets like Western tourists, diplomats and aid workers, in order to claim a ransom for release. The sums gathered for ransom, added to their incomes from smuggling across the Sahara, allow AQIM to fund its terrorist actions. Since 2001 attacks and assassination attempts in Maghreb and Sahel region increased by 56% of all terrorist attacks with peaks of 204 attacks in 2009 and 178 attacks 2010. According to the Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, “ over the past nine years, more than 1,100 terrorist bombings, murders, kidnappings, and ambushes against both domestic and international targets have claimed almost 2,000 lives and 6,000 victims of violence”⁵⁵.

The impact of AQIM's threats in the area is damageable to local economy and safety in general. For example, the decision to move the Paris-Dakar auto rally to South America because of security threats represented a significant loss for the tourist sector of Senegal, Mauritania and Morocco⁵⁶. If AQIM has its origins in North Africa with the majority of its members being Arabs and Berbers, the danger is still present to see AQIM link with local radical groups like Boko Haram in Nigeria or other terrorist groups⁵⁷.

The second terrorist group identified in West Africa is the Hezbollah. It has operational or opportunistic links in the region, especially through money laundering⁵⁸. Taking advantage of the widespread population of Lebanese descendants located in West Africa, Hezbollah recycles money gained from all kinds of trafficking and smuggling. Lebanese smugglers used West Africa as a transit point to transport heroin to the USA as early as 1952⁵⁹. There is evidence to indicate that the donations and fund

raising of Lebanese Shiite community in the area has been used to conceal money laundering and financing of terrorism⁶⁰.

The last group allegedly operative in West Africa are the Afghan Taliban. On 10 an 12 February 2010 five Afghan were arrested in Monrovia, Liberia. They were charged of heroin smuggling in West Africa in order to fund Taliban weapon purchases⁶¹.

Besides drug trafficking and terrorism, the third emerging threat in West Africa is piracy and oil bunkering. The area of predilection of pirates in West Africa is the Gulf of Guinea. According to the United Nations Office on Drug and Crime (UNODC), the area is in the top three piracy hotspot in the world⁶². After Somalia, seas of West Africa are the most dangerous in the Africa. But, in contrast to Somalia pirates, the ones evolving in the Gulf of Guinea target the cargo and the vessels, the former for smuggling and the later for ransoming⁶³. Piracy in West Africa has both political and economic causes. It is facilitated by a lack of law enforcement on the seas, extreme poverty and resentments against the vessels⁶⁴. In addition the proliferation of small arms in the region supports the work of the pirates. Gulf of Guinea countries are estimated to lose 5.5 million barrels of oil worth over one billion dollars annually due to oil bunkering or oil theft⁶⁵.

Furthermore, shipping traffic towards major ports in the Gulf of Guinea is decreasing, with a commensurate loss of income for countries like Benin, Togo and Ghana. A noticeable aspect of piracy in West Africa is the role played by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) an irredentist movement fighting against the Nigerian government and the oil companies for compensation for damages made to the environment and a better distribution of local resources. The MEND targets oil facilities

for bunkering and hostage taking, while on sea it practices piracy. It is not by chance if the majority of incidents relating to piracy (54%) in West Africa between 2001 and 2008 occurred in Nigeria⁶⁶. But more worrisome are the attacks launched by the MEND against surrounding countries (for example in 2008 in Cameroon), the capital city of Nigeria and the oil platforms in the high seas, thus causing interruption of production. So piracy constitutes a serious threat in West Africa because it can hinder international economic development and further isolate a struggling subcontinent from the global market where its part is already insignificant⁶⁷.

The fourth emerging threat in West Africa is the challenge to democratic governance, due to election disputes and the resurgence of coups d'état⁶⁸. With the end of the Cold War and the wave of national conferences in the 90's democratic exercise of power seemed on the verge of becoming the norm for West Africa. A position reinforced by the African Union and ECOWAS which adopted a zero tolerance policy towards unconstitutional change of power. However, the respect for the rules of the game could not always be guaranteed with more and more electoral processes leading to contestations, disputes and violence. If successful transitions have occurred in some countries (Cape Verde, Ghana, Benin and Senegal), the general tendency is confrontation between the proclaimed winners and the defeated. Unscrupulous leaders usually use socio-ethnic differences in the pursuit of their agenda to gain and retain power, causing opponents to feel ostracized and thus more inclined to revert to violence⁶⁹. The presidential elections in 2010 in Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea are good examples of violent outbreak of elections along ethnic line⁷⁰.

The second challenge to democracy is the resurgence of unconstitutional change of government through military coups. Between 2003 and 2010 the region has experienced 5 coups (Guinea-Bissau in 2003; Mauritania in 2002 and 2008; Guinea in 2008 and Niger in 2010), three failed attempts (Togo in 2005; and Guinea-Bissau in 2010 and 2011) and a murder of a president in office (President Nino Vieira of Guinea Bissau on 22 March 2009). Of course, military coups are not a new event in the region which has experienced 38 successful coups since 1963, but the concern remains that they disrupt democratic processes, send bad signals to international community deterring much needed investments. The risk is obvious, as a lack of foreign investment leads directly to depression, weak economies, poverty and social unrest. In addition, recent history has shown that unconstitutional changes of government often start a spiral of social mayhem and violence like that witnessed in Liberia, in Sierra Leone and in Cote d'Ivoire that has repercussions far beyond the country involved.

Strategic Implications of New Threats

The strategic implications of these threats in West Africa are multidimensional. Of course, they are not an isolated phenomenon. Furthermore, their impact is felt within the sub-region and in other parts of the continent as well as in Europe and America. They create a vicious circle of instability, the impact of which is primarily borne by West African people, but with increasing direct negative impact on global security

Drug trafficking represents a credible threat to the ability of West African countries to maintain peace and security. Drug smugglers have today the capacity to exploit and further undermine West Africa's already weak governments, impede development and eventually reignite smoldering conflicts⁷¹. The transformation of the region to a hub for drug and weapon stockpiling undermines the efforts of governments

to deal with organized crime and trans-border insecurity. The large amounts of money injected through these illegal activities threaten other legal economic activities and fosters corruption. In addition, the availability of large uncontrolled amounts of money is a potential source of financing for extremist groups or warlords. The appeal for quick and easy wealth threatens to transform weak states into narco-states in such countries as Guinea-Bissau. The Intergovernmental Group Against Money Laundering in West Africa (GIABA) prepared a 2010 report which advised that money laundering is becoming a major concern in West Africa⁷².

The persistence of terrorism has the potential to jeopardize efforts undertaken by ECOWAS and other stakeholders to stabilize the region. AQIM's presence in the region is a real danger as it could transform the areas it controls into safe heaven and training camps for all sort of outlaw groups. Furthermore, the nexus between terrorists and drug smugglers increases the destabilizing potentiality. Terrorist groups can easily take advantage of poverty, religious and ethnic diversity, the growth of unoccupied youth and other factors to foster their ideology. The attacks against expatriates, law enforcement and infrastructures also undermine the legitimacy of governments unable to protect their citizens.

As for piracy, its escalation both in frequency and intensity in the Gulf of Guinea threatens economic survival of the states located in the area. African countries depend strongly on international trade for their supply on various products manufactured in other parts of the world, but also for the commercialization of their products mainly composed by raw materials. To that extent maritime transportation represents the appropriate gateway to integrate international markets. The threat posed by piracy in

West Africa generates an increase of maritime insurance cost and a decline in customs and ports revenues because maritime companies tend to avoid the region. In addition the attacks on offshore oil facilities have a destabilizing consequence on global oil prices.

Finally, the resurgence of undemocratic change of power represents a great challenge for democratic governments. The specter of coups had almost disappeared in the sub-region and democracy appeared to become the norm. Its reemergence creates a new and unwelcomed paradigm. The logical outcome is a vicious circle of instability not favorable to foreign investments so essential if the prevalence of poverty is to be cured.

The new threats represent a great danger for peace and stability in the region because no state is able to handle them alone, even when they occur within national borders. In addition, the perpetrators of these crimes seek to weaken further existing states in order to carry on their business without restraint. Furthermore, West African States rely mainly on existing regional organizations, especially ECOWAS, to solve the problems raised by these new threats.

Strategies against Threats in West Africa

The cornerstone of the struggle for peace and safety in West Africa is represented by ECOWAS. The regional organization was created in 1975 with the primary objective of promoting economic integration and cooperation in order to achieve development⁷³. However, the persistent instability in West Africa, due mainly to poverty, civil unrest, and political turmoil, has represented a major impediment to integration. Consequently, leaders realized that without peace and stability any effort to foster development would be fruitless.

The first attempts to deal with instability in the area consisted of additional protocols to the initial ECOWAS Treaty. The adoption of the Protocol of Non-Aggression and Defense in 1978 (PNA) and the Protocol on Mutual Assistance and Defense (MAD) in 1981 aimed to stabilize the region, especially after the Mali-Burkina Faso war in 1975 and in regard to recurrent violent military coups. Unfortunately, the suspicion and fear of Francophone countries from regional nation states such as Nigeria, impeded proper function of these mechanisms⁷⁴. Furthermore, France constantly sought to contain West Africa's Anglophone giant⁷⁵ and its negative influence pushed some of its former colonies to sign a non-aggression and defense accord (ANAD) on 19 June 1977, aiming principally at protecting them against Nigeria.

Despite these factors, the devastating effects of civil wars in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire, combined with a reluctance of Western countries to intervene, convinced West African countries to overcome their divergences in order to solve their regional problems together. The ECOWAS Monitoring Group's (ECOMOG) intervention in the aforementioned countries gave the regional body international legitimacy and aura, but also an undeniable experience in peacekeeping and peace enforcement missions. A clear indication of their intertwined destiny enabled West African countries to overcome suspicions between Anglophones and Francophones which prevented the MAD and the PNA to be implemented⁷⁶. To prevent such blockades in the future and a resurgence of violence in the sub-region, it became obvious that a change was needed in ECOWAS's structures and mechanisms. Since 1990 the organization has adopted a new approach to prevent conflict and state fragility. It has evolved and shifted from an ECOWAS of states to an ECOWAS of the

people, with the well-being and welfare of West Africa as the center of its activities and policy initiatives, as well as a better integration of civil society being its priority. To face insecurity and instability, the major impediments to integration and development, West African countries have adopted a series of add-ons to the ECOWAS Treaty⁷⁷. It is worth to mention that all these initiatives don't have the same importance and four of these changes could be considered as revolutionary, because they clearly portray this new commitment to peace and security.

The first one is the revision of the initial Treaty in 1993. It aims to accelerate economic integration, promote political cooperation and foster the principle of supranationality in the application of decisions⁷⁸. Secondly, is the Declaration of the Moratorium on Importation, Exportation and Manufacture of Small Arms (31 October 1998) which recommends state members take active measures to fight the proliferation of small arms and light weapons⁷⁹. The third is the Protocol for Conflict Prevention, Management, Resolution, Peacekeeping and Security known as the Mechanism adopted in 1999⁸⁰. The Mechanism now supersedes the MAD and the PNA which failed to prevent conflicts within the sub-region. Under this new architecture, , ECOWAS has the supranational powers to act on behalf of and in consultation with Member States, the AU and the UN and the legitimacy to intervene to protect human security through acts of prevention, reaction and rebuilding, which leads to a good regional adaptation of the Responsibility to Protect⁸¹. And fourth, is the latest addition to the ECOWAS Peace and Security Architecture with the adoption of the ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework (ECPF) in January 2008⁸². This act stresses conflict prevention and is aimed at averting impending crisis, resolving an immediate crisis, and

focusing on structural conflict prevention by addressing the root causes of state fragility in order to prevent the re-emergence of conflict⁸³.

The ECOWAS peace framework in general and the mechanism in particular, primarily focus on conflict prevention and resolution. The structures currently implemented are inadequate in the context of the struggle to counter the danger represented by emerging threats in West Africa which this paper sets out. However the West African countries have perceived the necessity to deal with these new threats by carrying out new and additional measures.

Responses to the Threat of Drugs

Concerning drug trafficking, attempts to stem its tide in West Africa have a long history. ECOWAS has undertaken several actions in the past to address the challenges posed by organized crime. Its engagement to fight drug threat started during the 21st Summit of Heads of State and Government in Abuja, Nigeria on 30 – 31 October 1998, when it issued a declaration entitled “Community Flame Ceremony – The Fight Against Drugs”. Following this commitment, major decisions were made through a myriad of notable resolutions. These decisions were not operative, except for the Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing in West Africa (GIABA) established by ECOWAS. This group has sought to sensitize member states to the debilitating effects of money laundering through its training programs and seeks to improve the capacity of member states to understand the interrelated threats of drugs and money laundering⁸⁴. With the surge of drug seizures after 2004 concern started to rise over the alarming transformation of the region into a hub and its consequences on the youth and weak states.

Consequently, in October 2008, Ministers and experts from the 15 Member States of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) designed in Praia, Cape Verde, a Regional Action Plan to combat illicit drug trafficking, organized crime and drug abuse for the period 2008-2011⁸⁵. This document was officially endorsed by those countries at the 35th ECOWAS Ordinary Summit of Heads of State and Government on 19 December 2009, together with a Political Declaration on the Prevention of Drug Abuse, Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in West Africa. The Regional Action Plan turns around five salient points to include the mobilization of ECOWAS political leadership, increasing effective law enforcement, establishing an improved legal framework, addressing drug abuse and health problems, and establishing a reliable database. As for the Political Declaration on the Prevention of Drug Abuse, Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in West Africa, it urges the UNODC to strengthen its technical assistance in the region for the implementation of the Regional Action Plan.

To respond to the challenges presented by the region, and to the call for support from ECOWAS to implement its Action Plan in combating illicit drug trafficking and related organized crime in West Africa, the UN through the UNODC, Department of Political Affairs (UN DPA) and Department of Peace Keeping Operations (UN DPKO) ,as well as the International Criminal Police Organization (ICPO) INTERPOL , have entered into a partnership leading to the development diverse programs of action. The preeminent one is the West Africa Coast Initiative (WACI) which targets four post-conflict countries: Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea Bissau, Liberia and Sierra Leone. The objective of the WACI is capacity building in law enforcement, forensics, intelligence, border

management, criminal justice systems and anti-money-laundering. It also includes provision for the establishment of a Transnational Crime Unit (TCU) in each of the four countries, responsible for intelligence gathering and law enforcement cross-border collaboration⁸⁶.

Response to the Threat of Undemocratic Changes of Power

Governance has been one of the most challenging issues in West Africa. Lack of transparency, poor governance, and exclusion led to the wave of violence in the last decades. As a consequence ECOWAS included the necessity of good governance in its Declaration of Political Principles signed on July 1991 in Abuja⁸⁷. The member states recognized and committed to the respect of the fundamental human rights and in the African charter on human development. Furthermore, ECOWAS revised treaty of 1993 and stressed the “promotion and consolidation of the democratic system of governance in each member state”⁸⁸. In addition, the Supplementary Protocol on Good Governance and Democracy of December 2001 established the guiding principles of good participatory democracy, good governance and the rule of law⁸⁹. Above all, the principle of separation of powers and zero tolerance of unconstitutional change of power were highly regarded in accordance with AU charter⁹⁰.

Despite this, the recent coups in Guinea, Niger and Mauritania⁹¹ put ECOWAS in a delicate position, because its adamant rejection of any coup had to be reconciled with an apparent popular support to perpetrators, especially in Niger and Guinea. One of the weaknesses of ECOWAS regarding good governance is that the implementation of many principles depends on states goodwill. The peer review principle, as to the efficiency of the council of the wise, relies on both cooperation and adherence to the founding principles of the parties involved in a crisis. There is no supranational coercion

on states, besides condemnation of principles and political suspense. In addition ECOWAS' mechanism for elections monitoring doesn't necessarily guarantee a fair, equitable and peaceful poll.

Response to Piracy and Terrorism

With respect to the increasing threat of piracy in the Gulf of Guinea and its cross-border implications, the region cannot call upon a global response as it can do for drug trafficking. West African countries lack legal framework to deal with such a complex threat⁹². Recently the Chairman of the ECOWAS Mediation and Security Council, Nigeria's Foreign Minister Ambassador Olugbenga Ashiru has stressed the need for ECOWAS to draft a holistic maritime strategy to deal with regional threat posed by this phenomenon⁹³. Additionally, the UN Security Council Resolution 2018 of 31 October 2011, "called upon States of ECOWAS, the Economic Community of Central African States (ECCAS), the Gulf of Guinea Commission, and other nations of those victimized by piracy in the region, to cooperate in the prosecution of alleged perpetrators, including facilitators and financiers of such acts, and welcomed the intention to convene a summit including the Gulf of Guinea Heads of State to consider a comprehensive response"⁹⁴. For the moment, the most threatened countries (Nigeria, Benin, and Togo) are trying to find a solution to the problem by joining their forces to reduce the impact of piracy on their economy⁹⁵. However the 40th ordinary summit of ECOWAS heads of state and government held in February 2012 is expected to give additional direction in how to tackle drug and piracy problems in West Africa⁹⁶.

As in the case of piracy, West Africa lacks either a sub-regional counterterrorism framework or a mechanism for facilitating sub-regional capacity-building activities and cooperation in this area. Up to now ECOWAS's main tool to counter terrorists is the

Intergovernmental Action Group against Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing in West Africa (GIABA)⁹⁷. However, in many countries, the impact of terrorism is not well understood and counterterrorism is often viewed as western discourse to address a western problem. Except for Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Nigeria, the actions of AQIM are not felt elsewhere and the threat of Boko Haram is mainly regarded as an internal ethnic problem. As a consequence there is a lack of policy and unity of action against terrorism. To palliate this deficit, the United States has sought to help the most exposed countries of the Sahel by increasing their readiness and capability through the Pan Sahel Initiative (PSI) in 2002, followed by the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Initiative (TSCTI) since 2005, recently changed to the Trans-Sahara Counter Terrorism Partnership (TSCTP)⁹⁸.

Recommendations

In the fight against the drug problems of the region, ECOWAS should review the outcomes of the Regional Plan 2008-2011 against drug trafficking to assess its effectiveness. An expansion of the programs of the West African Coast Initiative would also strengthen more of the targeted countries. Furthermore, the implementation of TCU's in the remaining West African countries could enable to harmonize the fight against drug traffickers. ECOWAS should seek to integrate its action in a broader scope with a long term objective. Cooperation and coordination with other actors like the United States, Latin American and European countries (through organizations like the Maritime Analysis and Operations Center (MAOC) in Lisbon) would enable them to overcome their lack of resources. ECOWAS should establish a dedicated organization in charge of coordinating the operations of various law enforcement entities. The example of the Joint Inter-agencies Task Force South implemented in the US to

coordinate the struggle against drug smugglers could serve as an example. ECOWAS should empower law enforcement entities and copy the example of East and South African community police integration. ECOWAS should harmonize procedures and laws to prevent drug traffickers to take advantage of discrepancies between countries. Finally, ECOWAS should ultimately take into account the social dimension of fighting drug trafficking adopting a cross government approach. Law enforcement agent will not resist corruption if they live in poor conditions.

With regards to fighting piracy, ECOWAS should adopt a plan of action to tackle the political, economic and juridical aspects of the problem. A negotiated solution should be found to deny safe heavens to insurgents. Additionally, ECOWAS should establish a dedicated organization in charge of coordinating the operations of various law enforcement entities. A Joint Inter-agencies Task Force could enable to coordinate the action of entities fighting against drug trafficking and piracy. Cooperation with organizations like the MAOC and FRONTEX in the European Union could also help. Finally, ECOWAS should convince international partners to help implement a Joint Task Force similar to the one in charge of the fight against piracy in the Horn of Africa.

In the regional fight against terrorism, ECOWAS should adopt quickly a regional counter-terrorism strategy and implementation plan. They should also adopt a framework or a mechanism for facilitating sub-regional capacity-building. ECOWAS should work closely with civil society to sensitize population on real danger and impact of terrorism and should empower law enforcement agencies to enable them to gather intelligence, track and obtain evidence on terrorist financiers and money launderers.

Finally, ECOWAS should help and encourage states to tighten security and enforce border controls.

With regards to unconstitutional changes of government, ECOWAS should establish standard principles for electoral process in the sub-region. They should also establish guidance relating to transparency and funding of political parties. ECOWAS should adopt dissuasive measures to prevent perpetrators of coups to run freely for election and should adopt dissuasive measures to protect constitutions against undue or abusive modification. Finally, ECOWAS should establish standard principles to foster good governance and ban abuse by leaders.

Conclusion

As seen through this paper, the West African countries have made a great effort to try to solve the problem of insecurity in the sub-region. Having a clear understanding that economic development and prosperity could not be achieved without a stable environment and a joint effort, they took appropriate measures to supplement weak states in solving internal and external conflagrations. The main focus has been initially to stop conflicts then to prevent them by leveraging ECOWAS institutions. The sub-regional organization has gained international respect and recognition for its peacekeeping commitment. The lessons learned from the interventions in Liberia, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire have guided the reorientation of the organization's action to avoid the constraints of the past in order to be more operative. The new ECOWAS Conflict Prevention Framework represents the cornerstone of the regional actions in terms of peace and stability building. However the reforms brought to ECOWAS since 1990 are not enough to confront security problems in the region. The organization has been diverted from its main goal of integration and development. As

for conflict prevention, adequate measure should be taken to reform the security sector and put human security at the center of the preoccupations. Precarious living conditions and a bulge of unemployed youth only facilitate the spread of insecurity. Furthermore, the current structures and legal framework are not sufficient to tackle the emerging threats of drug trafficking, terrorism, piracy and unconstitutional change of power. In response, the regional organization needs to adapt quickly in order to counter the new and dangerous perils. To do otherwise runs the risk that the new threats will prove even more pernicious than those previous. This paper has made few recommendations, hoping that they might be helpful in that process.

Endnotes

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